



**AFRICAN-AMERICAN AFFAIRS COMMISSION
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Testimony before the Human Services Committee

Thursday, February 10th, 2011

10:00 AM in Room 2B of the LOB

Good morning Senator Musto, Representative Tercyak and members of the Human Services Committee. My name is Frank Sykes the Legislative Analyst of the African-American Affairs Commission (AAAC) a non-partisan state agency. This Commission is an advocate for the African-American community and accomplishes its mission primarily through research, policy analysis, advocacy and information sharing. The Commission is here today to testify in support of Senate Bill:

(SB) 840 – An act concerning educational activities for participants in the Jobs First Program.

and

(HB) 5558 – An act concerning educational opportunities for recipients of temporary family assistance under the Jobs First Program.

One of the mandates of this Commission is to improve and promote the human and material development of the African-American community in our state. Consequently ensuring that families facing poverty have the ability to transition

from poverty to economic self sufficiency remains a priority. In 2009, 16.8 percent of Connecticut families had incomes less than 200 percent of the federal poverty level(FPL), meaning below \$44,100 in annual income for a family of four. While the condition of poverty affects all races, African-Americans who make up at least 14 percent of enrollees in the temporary family assistance (TFA) program, experience significantly higher rates of poverty.¹ Connecticut's overall poverty rate in 2009 was 9.4 percent whereas the rate for African-Americans.² was 19.8 percent.

The educational attainment of enrollees in TFA is minimal at best, yet research demonstrates that the most effective way to address poverty is through education and job training. Education Trust a recognized organization committed to closing the achievement gap, documents that individuals with a college degree are more likely to hold an administrative, managerial or executive position and are also ten times more likely to have a family income over the poverty level.

In this period of economic hardship with many individuals and families facing uncertainty, education remains the key to the future. Unfortunately strict time limits in receiving assistance makes it extremely difficult for many to pursue education, enhance their employability, and hence become productive citizens of our state. This bill seeks to reverse this trend by extending the benefit period required for participants while enrollees receiving the education and job training required. It has merit and the Commission urges the full support of the legislature to ensure its passage.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

¹ U.S. Census Bureau. 2009 *American Community Survey*. Table B17026. Ratio of Income to Poverty Level of Families in the Past 12 Months.

² U.S. Census Bureau. 2009 *American Community Survey*. Tables B17001, B17001A, B17001B, B17001I. Poverty Status in the Past 12 Months by Sex by Age for Whom Poverty Status is Determined.